

R 152202Z JAN 03
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3509
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
DIA WASHDC
DIRONDCP WASHDC
JOINT STAFF WASHDC
NSC WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 000342

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SUBJECT: FARC KIDNAPS CIVILIANS FOR CAR BOMB ATTACKS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR ANNE W. PATTERSON, REASONS 1.5(B)(D)

11. (U) IN ITS LATEST WAVE OF CAR BOMB ATTACKS IN ARAUCA, THE FARC REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN KIDNAPPING CIVILIANS AND USING THEM AS UNWITTING SUICIDE DRIVERS OF CARS LOADED WITH EXPLOSIVES. ONCE THE CARS REACH THEIR TARGET, THE EXPLOSIVES ARE DETONATED VIA REMOTE CONTROL. SINCE JANUARY 8, THERE HAVE BEEN THREE SUCH ATTACKS BY THE FARC IN ARAUCA DEPARTMENT. IN TWO OF THESE ATTACKS, THE FARC KIDNAPPED THREE BROTHERS AND FORCED TWO OF THEM TO DRIVE THE CARS. THE BROTHERS WERE TOLD THEY WOULD BE SET FREE IF THEY WOULD DRIVE A CAR ON AN ERRAND FOR THE FARC. IN ONE OF THE INCIDENTS, ONE OF THE BROTHERS SURVIVED THE EXPLOSION TO TELL THE AUTHORITIES ABOUT THE FARC'S NEW TACTIC. PARTS OF ARAUCA CONSTITUTE ONE OF THE GOC'S TWO REHABILITATION ZONES AND THE DEPARTMENT IS THE CENTER OF COLOMBIA'S OIL PRODUCTION. THE BOMBINGS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE VILLAGES OF ARAUQUITA, TAME, AND NEAR FORTUL.

12. (U) MINISTER OF DEFENSE MARTHA LUCIA RAMIREZ ANNOUNCED ON JANUARY 14 THAT THE GOC WOULD DENOUNCE THE FARC'S USE OF HOSTAGES IN THE CAR BOMB ATTACKS BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA. THE DECISION TO BRING THESE CASES TO THE UN WAS TAKEN AFTER A SPECIAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON JANUARY 13 BETWEEN PRESIDENT URIBE AND MILITARY OFFICIALS.

13. (C) COMMENT: DETONATING CAR BOMBS AND KIDNAPPING CIVILIANS ARE NOTHING NEW FOR THE FARC. IT HAS USED CAR BOMBS FOR ATTACKS IN ARAUCA, BOGOTA AND ELSEWHERE IN COLOMBIA AND HAS KIDNAPPED HUNDREDS OF CIVILIANS FOR RANSOM AND TO PRESSURE THE GOC TO RELEASE FARC MEMBERS IN JAIL. THE THREE MOST RECENT ARAUCA CAR BOMBINGS REPRESENT THE FIRST TIME THAT THE FARC HAS USED, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, UNSUSPECTING KIDNAP VICTIMS TO BE AGENTS OF TERRORIST ATTACKS. LAST YEAR, THE FARC MURDERED A CIVILIAN AND LEFT HIM IN HIS BOOBY-TRAPPED CAR WHICH DETONATED WHEN THE AUTHORITIES ARRIVED. WITH THE WIDE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THESE ATTACKS, THIS NEW TACTIC WILL HAVE LIMITED UTILITY, SINCE KIDNAP VICTIMS ARE UNLIKELY TO BE AS COOPERATIVE AS DRIVERS IF THEY KNOW THAT THEY ARE FACING NEAR-CERTAIN DEATH. END COMMENT.

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